

STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No 137

22p



**GUARDIAN
of the VORTEX**

STARBLAZER



ONE OF THE MOST DEADLY HAZARDS IN THE GALAXY WAS THE GRAVITY VORTEX, FORMED BY THE COLLISION OF REAL AND ANTI-MATTER BLACK HOLES WHICH PUNCHED A TUNNEL THROUGH THE FABRIC OF SPACE. ANY VESSEL ENCOUNTERING AN UNCHARTED VORTEX WAS LIKELY TO BE SUCKED INSIDE, DISAPPEARING WITHOUT TRACE. THERE WAS A THEORY THAT THE VORTEX COULD BE USED FOR ALMOST INSTANTANEOUS TRAVEL OVER COLOSSAL DISTANCES, AND THE FIRST TO UNRAVEL THE SECRET WOULD HAVE A HUGE ADVANTAGE.


AT THIS TIME, THE FEDERATION FACED THE PREDATORY GOTHAN EMPIRE ACROSS A VAST, UNEASY FRONTIER. TO SATISFY THE GREEDY WARLORDS WHO KEPT HIM IN POWER, THE GOTHAN EMPEROR SOUGHT TO PLUNDER THE WEALTH OF THE FEDERATION, AND HIS THOUGHTS TURNED TO THE VORTEX.

GUARDIAN OF THE VORTEX

IN AN ISOLATED SECTOR
FAR FROM THE FRONTIER WITH THE
GOTHAN EMPIRE, FEDERATION AGENTS
LAYN AND KERN APPROACHED
THE NEUTRAL PLANET, TASSIN.




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ALTHOUGH DESCENDED FROM EARLY TERRAN COLONISTS, THE PEOPLE OF TASSIN CHOSE NOT TO JOIN THE FEDERATION AND GUARDED THEIR NEUTRALITY JEALOUSLY. TASSIN WAS A TARGET FOR RIM-RUNNERS, THE SUPPLIERS OF SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS.



THIS IS CLOSE ENOUGH, LAYN. THE FEDERATION WILL TAKE AWAY OUR BADGES IF WE VIOLATE TASSIN SPACE.

The panel shows two men in a cockpit. The man on the right, Layn, is older with grey hair and a serious expression, wearing a flight suit with a circular badge. The man on the left is younger, looking towards Layn. The cockpit has various controls and windows.

MAKE A WIDE SWEEP. WATCH THE SCANNER FOR RIM-RUNNERS.

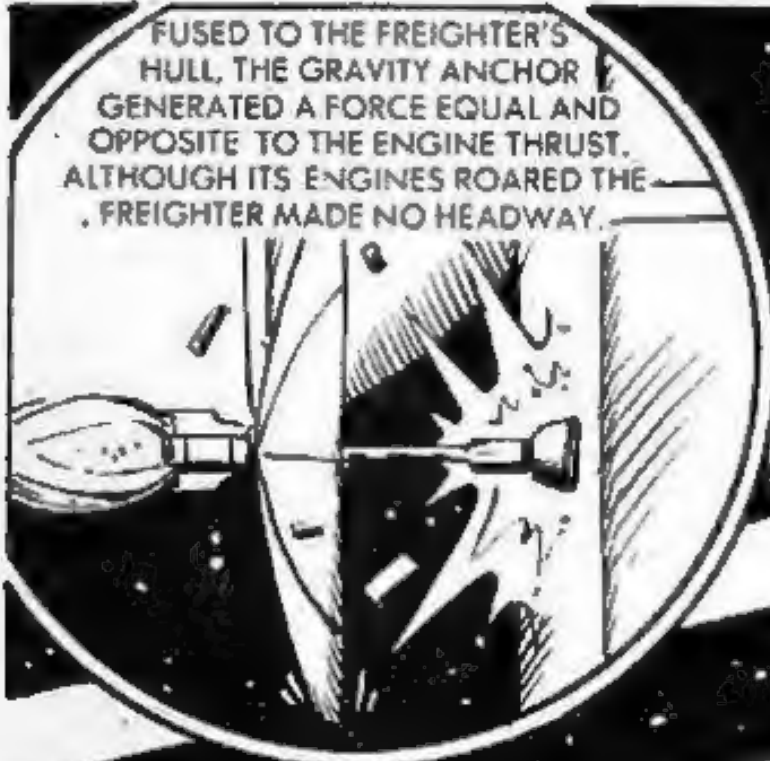


SIGMA 25


CRAFT ON SCAN—IT FITS THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CRAFT WE'RE AFTER.

The panel shows a large, angular spaceship labeled 'SIGMA 25' in space. A smaller, sleeker ship is seen in the distance, leaving a long, bright trail. The background is a dark space with stars and a small planet in the upper right.

THEY'RE MAKING A RUN FOR IT! GET AFTER THEM AND PREPARE THE GRAVITY ANCHOR FOR FIRING.




FUSED TO THE FREIGHTER'S HULL, THE GRAVITY ANCHOR GENERATED A FORCE EQUAL AND OPPOSITE TO THE ENGINE THRUST. ALTHOUGH ITS ENGINES ROARED THE FREIGHTER MADE NO HEADWAY.



SIGMA TWO FIVE, THIS IS THE FEDERATION INTELLIGENCE AGENCY. CUT YOUR ENGINES—YOU CANNOT ESCAPE.

AFTER DOCKING, LAYN FOUND A POWERFUL BEAM WEAPON IN THE FREIGHTER'S HOLD.



WHAT DOES THE RULER OF TASSIN WANT WITH A BATTLESHIP'S PHASER? HE HAS ONLY A FEW REBELS TO DEAL WITH—AT FULL POWER THIS CAN DESTROY A PLANET.

OUR JOB WAS TO DELIVER. NO QUESTIONS ASKED.

... BIGGEST DEAL WE EVER HAD.

THE CRAFT UNDOCKED AND WITH A HOLOGRAM RECORDING AS EVIDENCE, LAYN ACTIVATED A PLASMA BOMB TO ANNIHILATE THE FREIGHTER AND ITS DEADLY CARGO.



AS THEY SET COURSE FOR THEIR DISTANT BASE, THE SCANNER DETECTED A MYSTERIOUS OBJECT.

LOOK AT THAT!



IT APPEARED FROM NOWHERE—
AT LIGHT SPEED.



THERE . . . SOME SORT OF PROBE.

IT'S DECELERATING RAPIDLY.
LET'S GET AFTER IT.

THERE WAS NO RESPONSE FROM THE LIFE-FORM DETECTED INSIDE, SO LAYN PREPARED TO BOARD.



IT HAS AN OXYGEN ATMOSPHERE, LAYN, BUT LOOKS ALIEN. IT MAY BE HOSTILE.

THE PILOT COULD BE IN TROUBLE.
I MUST TAKE A LOOK.

LAYN PEERED INTO THE CRAMPED, INSTRUMENT-PACKED CABIN.

UGH! WHAT'S THIS?





IT'S A GOTHANI! HE'S OUT COLD AND SEEMS TO BE WIRED TO A MONITOR. BUT, KERN, HOW DID HE GET PAST OUR FRONTIER DEFENCES?

I'LL ALERT H.Q. COME BACK TO THE SHIP, LAYN, AND WE'LL TAKE THE PROBE IN TOW...

BUT WITHOUT WARNING THE PROBE ROTATED AND BLASTED AWAY IN THE DIRECTION IT HAD COME.

LAYN, THE DOCKING TUBE HAS SEVERED!

I CAN'T STOP IT, KERN. IT'S ON AUTO-CONTROL. ATTACH THE GRAVITY ANCHOR... IT'S MY ONLY CHANCE!

THE PROBE'S TREMENDOUS ACCELERATION LEFT KERN STRUGGLING TO CATCH UP.

IT'S NO GOOD, LAYN. THE PROBE'S TOO FAST ...
I CAN'T GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO FIRE THE
ANCHOR.



SUDDENLY, AS THE PROBE REACHED LIGHT SPEED ...

IT'S GONE FROM THE SCANNER—
COMPLETELY VANISHED.



THEN THE COMPUTER SCREAMED AN ALERT—

WARNING . . . CONDITION RED. INTENSE
GRAVITATIONAL FIELD DETECTED DEAD AHEAD.

AN UNCHARTED VORTEX! IT MUST
HAVE SWALLOWED THE PROBE . . .
GOT TO PULL AWAY.

KERN WRESTLED WITH THE CONTROLS BUT THE SHIP WAS TRAPPED IN THE GRIP OF THE VORTEX.

AAAAGH!

RELENTLESSLY THE CRAFT PLUNGED TO ITS DOOM.

FAR AWAY, DEEP IN GOTHAN TERRITORY, THE EMPEROR WAITED IN HIS BATTLE STATION FOR A FLEET TO GATHER.

THE GOTHAN EMPEROR, FLANKED BY ROBOT GUARDS, ADDRESSED HIS WARLORDS

I HAVE ORDERED THE FLEET TO ASSEMBLE. IF THE PROBE RETURNS SAFELY FROM THE VORTEX, OUR INVASION OF THE FEDERATION WILL COMMENCE



HAIL! LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!

THE WARLORDS SUPPORT ME ONLY WHILE I AM ABLE TO REWARD THEM... I NEED THE GREAT WEALTH OF THE EARTH FEDERATION TO SATISFY THEIR GREED.

CLOSE TO THE BATTLE STATION, THE PROBE SUDDENLY REAPPEARED

IT HAD SURVIVED THE VORTEX TO EMERGE HUNDREDS OF LIGHT YEARS AWAY FROM TASSIN--THE JOURNEY HAD TAKEN ONLY MINUTES.

A TRACTOR BEAM DREW THE PROBE INTO THE BATTLE STATION'S LABORATORY. LAYN HID AS GOTHAN TECHNICIANS PEERED INSIDE.

MORE GOTHANS! THEY MUST HAVE ESTABLISHED A BASE IN FEDERATION SPACE. I'VE GOT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS.

BUT THE FIRST TO ENTER THE PROBE WAS AN OLD, BEARDED TERRAN.

DON'T SHOOT, WHOEVER YOU ARE! STAY OUT OF SIGHT.

THE OLD MAN SHIELDED LAYN WHILE THE TECHNICIANS REMOVED THE UNCONSCIOUS GOTHAN.

HE SHOULD SOON RECOVER. TAKE HIM TO THE MEDICAL CENTRE AND WAIT THERE UNTIL I ARRIVE. THE PROBE MUST BE CHECKED.




THE OLD MAN WAS AN ASTRO-ENGINEER WHOSE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE MANY YEARS BEFORE HAD CAUSED A SENSATION THROUGHOUT THE FEDERATION.

DOCTOR ARDIN! YOU WERE GIVEN UP FOR DEAD LONG AGO. WHAT HAPPENED? AND WHAT ARE THE GOTHANS UP TO INSIDE THE FEDERATION?

ONE QUESTION AT A TIME, MY FRIEND. FIRST OF ALL, YOU ARE NO LONGER IN FEDERATION SPACE BUT AT THE CENTRE OF THE GOTHAN EMPIRE...

ARDIN AND HIS FAMILY HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED BY GOTHANS...

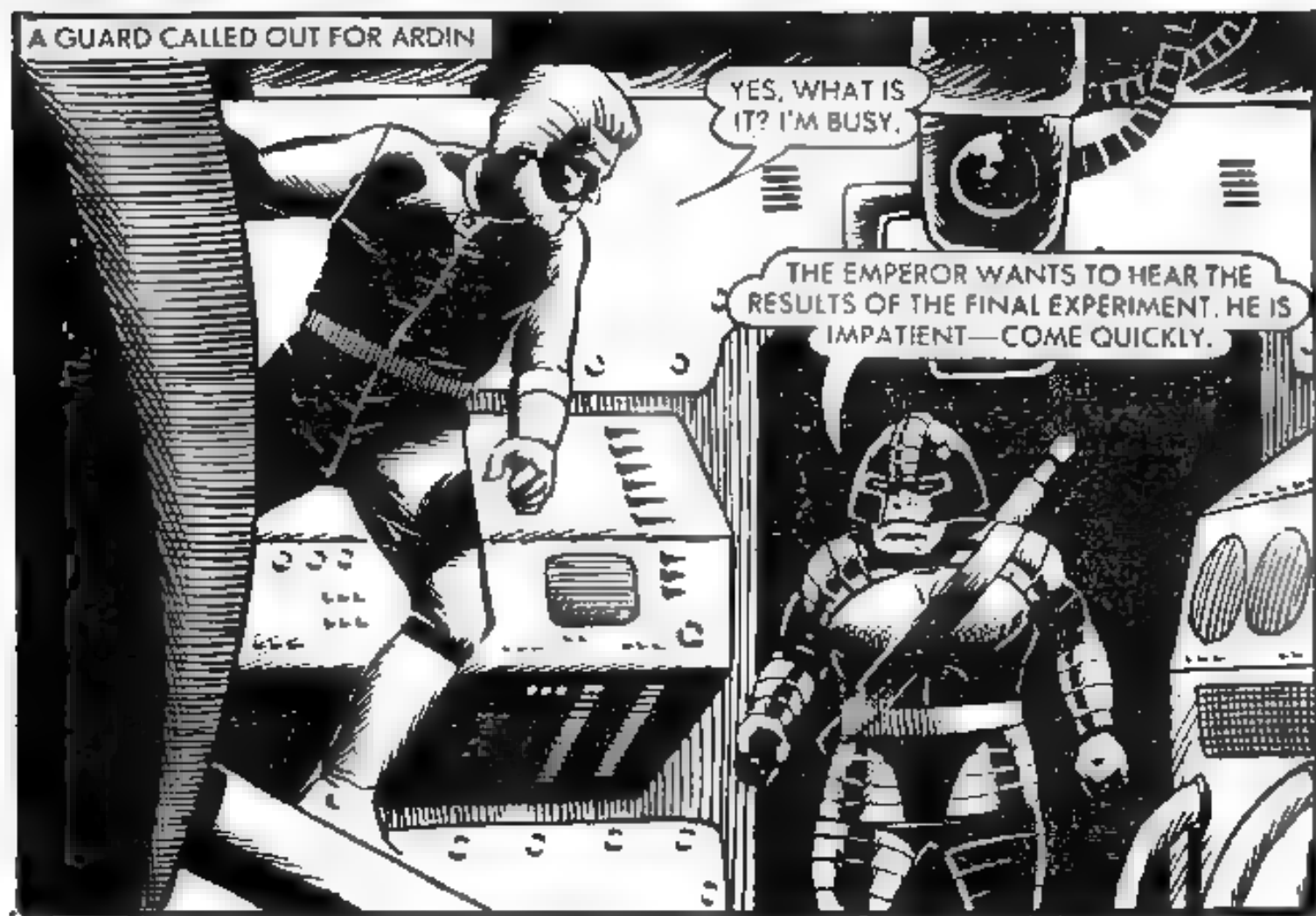
THE EMPEROR KNEW MY THEORY ON THE POSSIBILITY OF VORTEX TRAVEL AND THREATENED TO KILL MY WIFE AND CHILDREN IF I REFUSED TO WORK FOR HIM. I HAVE PERFECTED A DEVICE TO GENERATE A COMPLEX FORCE FIELD ENABLING SPACE-CRAFT TO PASS SAFELY THROUGH THE VORTEX. THE PROBE WAS THE LAST IN A SERIES TO TEST THE RELIABILITY OF THE VORTEX DEVICE.



DO YOU REALISE WHAT YOU'VE DONE, ARDIN? THE GOTHANS NOW HAVE A DIRECT ROUTE INTO THE FEDERATION. I'VE GOT TO WARN THEM AND YOU MUST DESTROY THE RESULTS OF YOUR RESEARCH.

BUT IT'S TOO LATE! THE GOTHAN INVASION FLEET IS ALREADY EQUIPPED WITH THE DEVICE. PLEASE DON'T CAUSE TROUBLE NOW... I WANT TO SEE MY FAMILY AGAIN.

A GUARD CALLED OUT FOR ARDIN



YES, WHAT IS IT? I'M BUSY.

THE EMPEROR WANTS TO HEAR THE RESULTS OF THE FINAL EXPERIMENT. HE IS IMPATIENT—COME QUICKLY.

ARDIN REPORTED COMPLETE SUCCESS, BUT WHEN HE BEGGED TO SEE HIS FAMILY, THE EMPEROR LAUGHED—

“AH! YOU TERRANS ARE SO GULLIBLE. YOU WILL NEVER SEE THEM AGAIN—THEY WERE EXTERMINATED LONG AGO!”

IN A BLIND FURY, ARDIN LUNGED AT THE EMPEROR BUT WAS SEIZED IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP, BY A ROBOGUARD—

“AAAGH!”

“A PUNY EFFORT, TERRAN. YOU ARE OF NO FURTHER USE TO ME. TAKE HIM AWAY!”

ARDIN KNEW DEATH AWAITED HIM.

TAKE THE TERRAN TO
THE DISPOSAL UNIT.

NO! I HAVE DONE EVERYTHING THE
EMPEROR DEMANDED ... YOU CAN'T KILL ME!

LAYN HEARD THE PROFESSOR'S DESPERATE SHOUT ...

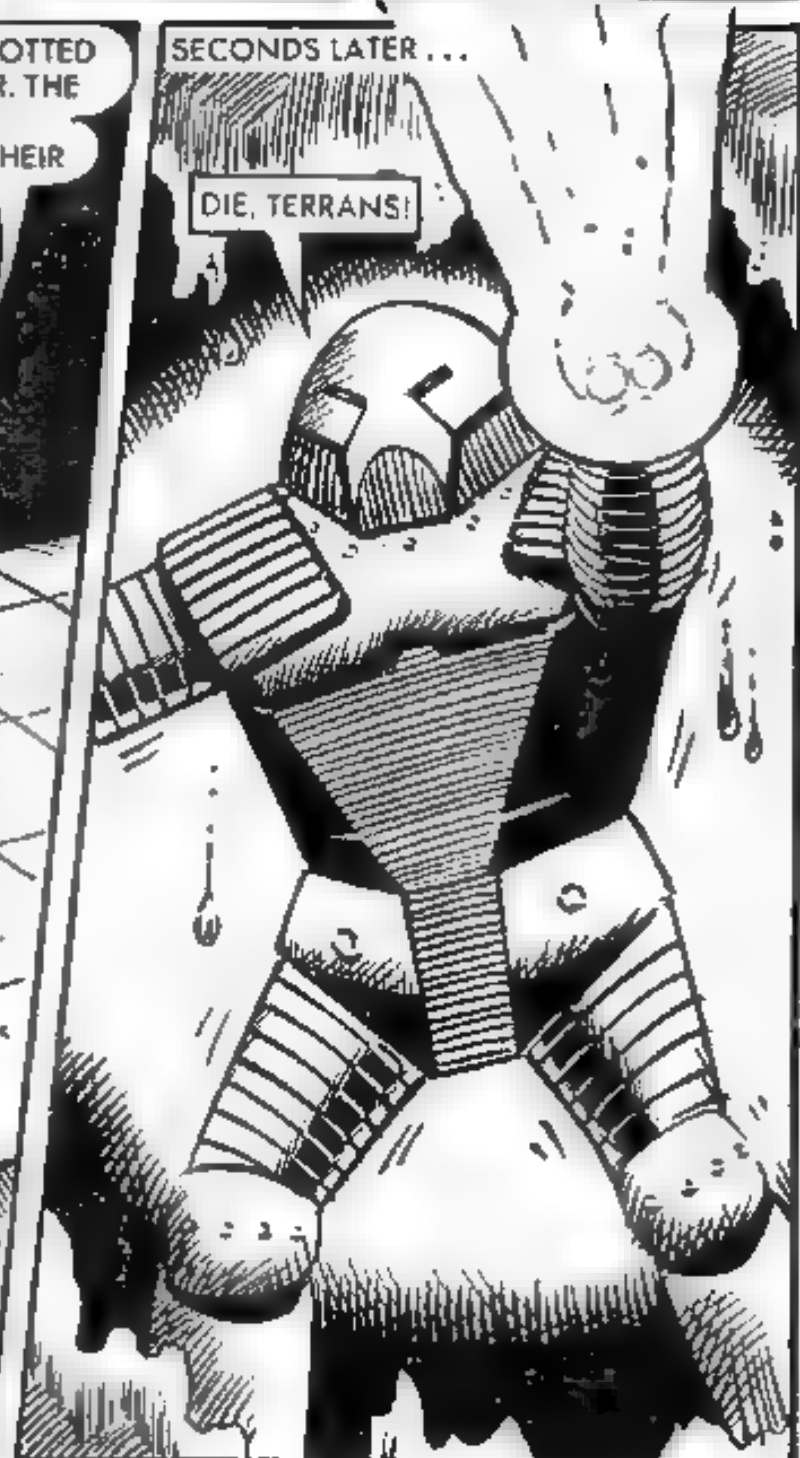
NEEDING ARDIN'S HELP TO ESCAPE, LAYN ACTED QUICKLY.

AAAGH!



THE PROBE IS OUR ONLY CHANCE OF ESCAPE TO THE FEDERATION. DOES IT HAVE ENOUGH POWER LEFT TO RETURN THROUGH THE VORTEX?

YES, BUT IT WILL BE A CLOSE THING. LOCK THE LABORATORY DOOR WHILE I REPROGRAMME THE PROBE'S NAVIGATION COMPUTER.



BUT THE ROBOT WAS TOO LATE—

WE MADE IT, DOC! PLOT
A COURSE FOR THE VORTEX

AS THE PROBE ACCELERATED TOWARDS THE VORTEX, THE
BATTLE-STATION HURLED A HIGH-ENERGY PHOTON BOLT.

THE BOLT DAMAGED OUR CONTROL
SYSTEMS... ACCELERATION IS
FALLING. IF THE PROBE ENTERS THE
VORTEX AT LESS THAN LIGHT SPEED,
IT WON'T BE ABLE TO BREAK FREE OF
THE GRAVITATIONAL FORCE AT THE
OTHER END... WE WILL BE TRAPPED
FOR EVER!


AS THE PROBE ENTERED THE VORTEX...

LIGHT SPEED—
WE MADE IT!

NOT YET! WE MUST MAINTAIN
MAXIMUM THRUST, BUT THE FUEL
CELL'S ALMOST DEPLETED.

MINUTES LATER, THEY EMERGED INTO FEDERATION SPACE.





WE ARE FREE OF THE VORTEX... BUT NOW
WHAT? WITHOUT LONG RANGE
COMMUNICATIONS, HOW SHALL WE ALERT
THE FEDERATION?


THE PLANET TASSIN IS NEAR. IT IS NEUTRAL, BUT
WHEN WE EXPLAIN THE GOTHAN THREAT ITS
RULER MUST HELP US.

THE PROBE WAS NOT DESIGNED FOR PLANETARY LANDINGS SO LAYN AND ARDIN BRACED
THEMSELVES FOR IMPACT.



THE CRAFT BROKE UP AND ARDIN
WAS THROWN OUT—

TRY NOT TO MOVE, DOC. THE AIR IS
THIN, SO SAVE YOUR ENERGY. OUR
LANDING MUST HAVE BEEN
DETECTED—HELP WILL ARRIVE
SOON.



LAYN... SAVE THE VORTEX DEVICE. THE
FEDERATION MUST HAVE IT... OR THE
GOTHANS WILL BE INVINCIBLE.

LAYN TORE THE DEVICE FROM ITS MOUNTING.

ARDIN, WHAT'S HAPPENING? IT'S
GLOWING... AND GETTING HOT!

YOU HAVE TRIGGERED THE AUTO-
DESTRUCT MECHANISM. DON'T PANIC...
YOU HAVE NINETY SECONDS.
PROGRAMME THE FOLLOWING...

LAYN FOLLOWED ARDIN'S
INSTRUCTIONS, AND DISARMED
THE DEVICE, BUT THE STRAIN
FINALLY TOLD ON THE
DOCTOR—

I'M ON MY OWN NOW. IN TIME
FEDERATION SCIENTISTS SHOULD
BE ABLE TO DUPLICATE THIS
CONTRAPTION BUT FIRST, I'VE
GOT TO WARN THEM ABOUT THE
GOTHANS.

LAYN WATCHED A WAVE OF SPACECRAFT PASSED OVERHEAD AND ATTACK TASSIN'S MOON DEFENCES—



THEY'RE CARRYING PROTON BOMBS. MORE THAN A MINOR REVOLUTION ■ HAPPENING HERE—IT'S A FULL SCALE WAR!

BEFORE LONG, HE SPOTTED A CRAFT SKIMMING LOW TOWARDS HIM

HERE I AM . . . OVER HERE!



BUT HIS RESCUERS WERE FAR FROM FRIENDLY.

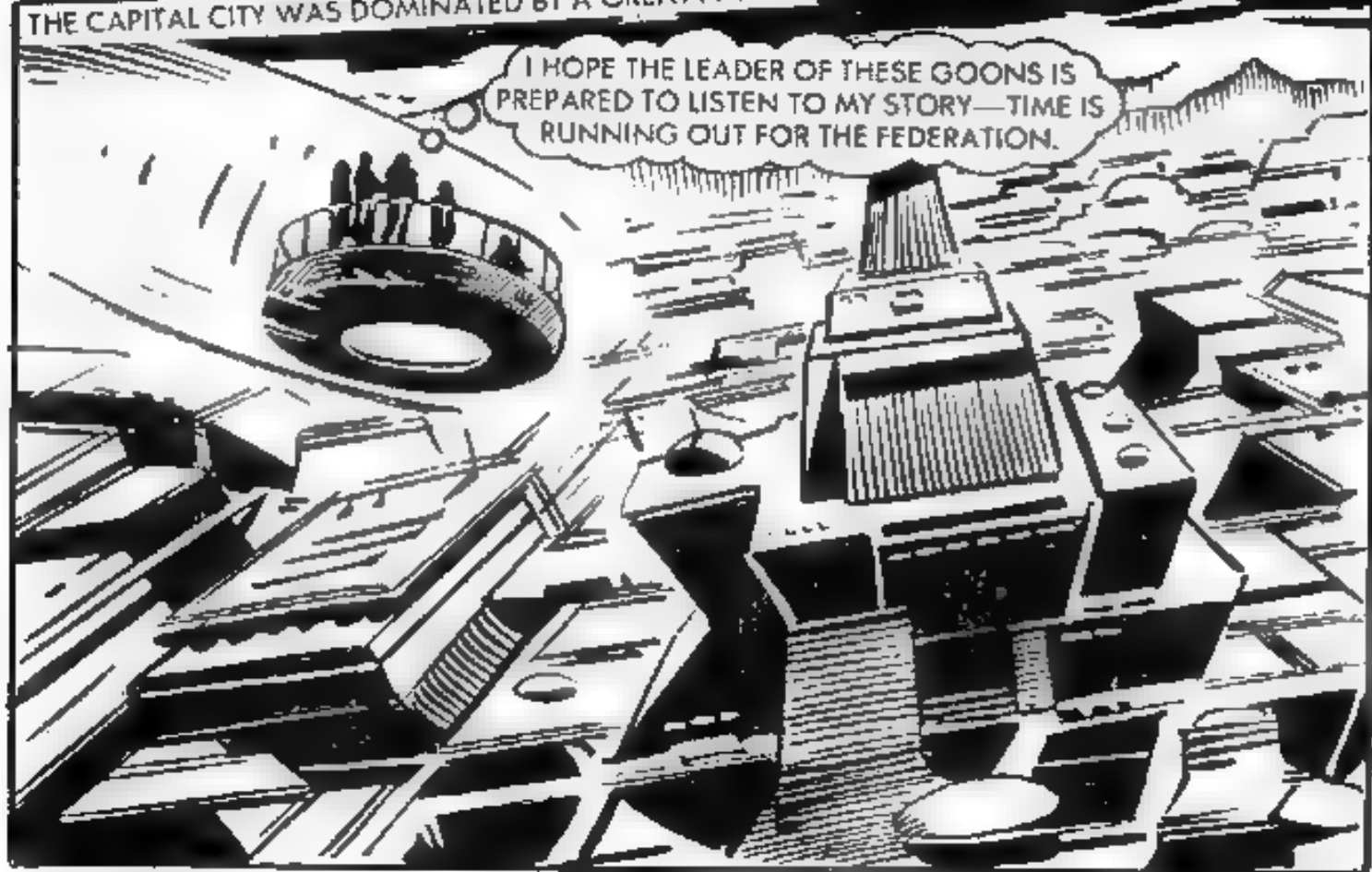
UGH! WHAT ARE
YOU DOING?

REMAIN SILENT AND YOU WILL NOT
BE HARMED. YOU ARE UNDER ARREST



THE CAPITAL CITY WAS DOMINATED BY A GREAT PALACE.

I HOPE THE LEADER OF THESE GOONS IS
PREPARED TO LISTEN TO MY STORY—TIME IS
RUNNING OUT FOR THE FEDERATION.



THE LEADER, A PETTY TYRANT CALLED MANIK, LISTENED TO LAYN'S PLEA FOR HELP.

WE ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE FEDERATION SO
THEIR FATE DOES NOT CONCERN US. HOWEVER,
THIS DOES . . . WHAT IS IT?

IT'S NOTHING . . . YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME!
THE GOTHANS WILL NOT RESPECT YOUR
NEUTRALITY. THEY WILL WIPE YOU OUT ALONG
WITH THE FEDERATION. THEY MUST BE
STOPPED!

THEN IT MUST BE YOU ALONE WHO STOP THEM.
THE GOTHAN WILL NOT CONCERN THEMSELVES
WITH US. YOU ANNOY ME! PUT HIM IN A
HOLDING UNIT.

MEANWHILE, ANOTHER VESSEL EMERGED FROM THE VORTEX NEAR TASSIN. IT WAS THE MIGHTY GUNSHIP OF LORD SKAR, SENT BY THE GOTHAN EMPEROR TO RETRIEVE THE PROBE AND THE TERRAN FUGITIVES BEFORE THE FEDERATION COULD BE WARNED OF HIS INVASION.



I WAS RIGHT. THE PROBE WAS DAMAGED BY THE PHOTON BOLT. IT IS EMITTING AN AUTOMATIC DISTRESS SIGNAL.

MANIX'S FIGHTERS INTERCEPTED THE GUNSHIP AS IT APPROACHED TASSIN'S MOON.

IT MUST BE A FEDERATION CRAFT!
THEY HAVE COME TO AID THE REBELS.

OUR WEAPONS CANNOT PENETRATE
THE INTRUDER'S DEFENCE SHIELDS!

I HAVE NO TIME TO PLAY WITH
THESE PRIMITIVES—DESTROY THEM!



USING ONLY ITS SECONDARY ARMAMENT, THE GUNSHIP ANNIHILATED THE ATTACKERS.


THE PROBE WAS LOCATED AND A TROOPER SENT TO RECOVER THE VORTEX DEVICE.

LORD SKAR, ARDIN IS DEAD BUT THE OTHER TERRAN HAS ESCAPED, AND MUST HAVE TAKEN THE DEVICE WITH HIM.

RETURN TO THE SHIP IMMEDIATELY. THE INHABITANTS OF THIS CONTEMPTIBLE PLACE ARE PROBABLY SHELTERING HIM. I WILL SEEK OUT THEIR LEADER...

MANIK'S GUARDS WERE NO MATCH FOR SKAR'S TROOPERS WHO STORMED THE PALACE.


ATTACK! SHOW NO
MERCY IF THEY RESIST.



PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPON.
RESISTANCE IS USELESS.



DO WHAT THE THING
SAYS... DROP YOUR GUNS.



I AM SKAR, WARLORD OF THE GOTHAN EMPIRE.
I SEEK THE TERRAN WHO ARRIVED IN THE PROBE.

LORD SKAR, HAVE MERCY! HE IS IN MY CUSTODY
... I WILL HAVE HIM BROUGHT HERE
IMMEDIATELY.

IN THE LABORATORY, MANIK'S SCIENTISTS WERE UNAWARE OF THE GOTHAN ATTACK AS
THEY EXAMINED THE VORTEX DEVICE.

WHAT IS
HAPPENING?

THEY'VE TRIGGERED THE AUTO-
DESTRUCT MECHANISM. I HAVE NINETY
SECONDS TO FRIGHTEN THEM
ENOUGH TO SET ME FREE.

IT WILL DESTROY THE ENTIRE PALACE!
I CAN DISARM IT—RELEASE MY HANDS.

GUARD, DO IT!
REMOVE THE CUFFS.



LAYN FUMBLING WITH THE DEVICE, FEIGNING PANIC.


IT'S TOO LATE! THE
PROCESS IS IRREVERSIBLE.

WE ARE DOOMED!



THE SCIENTISTS FLED. LAYN SEIZED HIS CHANCE.

THANKS FOR YOUR
CO-OPERATION.



AFTER CLOSING THE HATCH AND BLASTING THE LOCK, HE DEACTIVATED THE DEVICE.

THAT WAS CLOSE. NOW
TO FIND THE SPACEPORT.



HE HURRIED THROUGH THE CITY STREETS.

I MUST STICK OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB.

HE WAS RIGHT. HIS STRANGE FLIGHT DREW GLANCES FROM CURIOUS CITIZENS—ONE MAN IN PARTICULAR WATCHED HIM CLOSELY.

SKAR WAS FURIOUS WHEN HE LEARNED OF LAYN'S ESCAPE.

I DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH TROOPERS TO SEARCH THE CITY. USE ALL THE RESOURCES AT YOUR DISPOSAL. FIND HIM, OR MY GUNSHIP WILL DESTROY THE PALACE.

DO NOT BE ALARMED, LORD SKAR. IT WILL NOT BE DIFFICULT TO RECAPTURE HIM. ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SOUND THE CURFEW...

A SHRILL ALARM SOUNDED ACROSS THE CITY AND THE STREETS WERE SUDDENLY FILLED WITH ANXIOUS PEOPLE RUSHING IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE? THESE PEOPLE LOOK AS IF THEY'RE BEING CHASED BY DEMONS.

LAYN GRABBED A WORRIED CITIZEN —

TELL ME... WHAT'S HAPPENING?

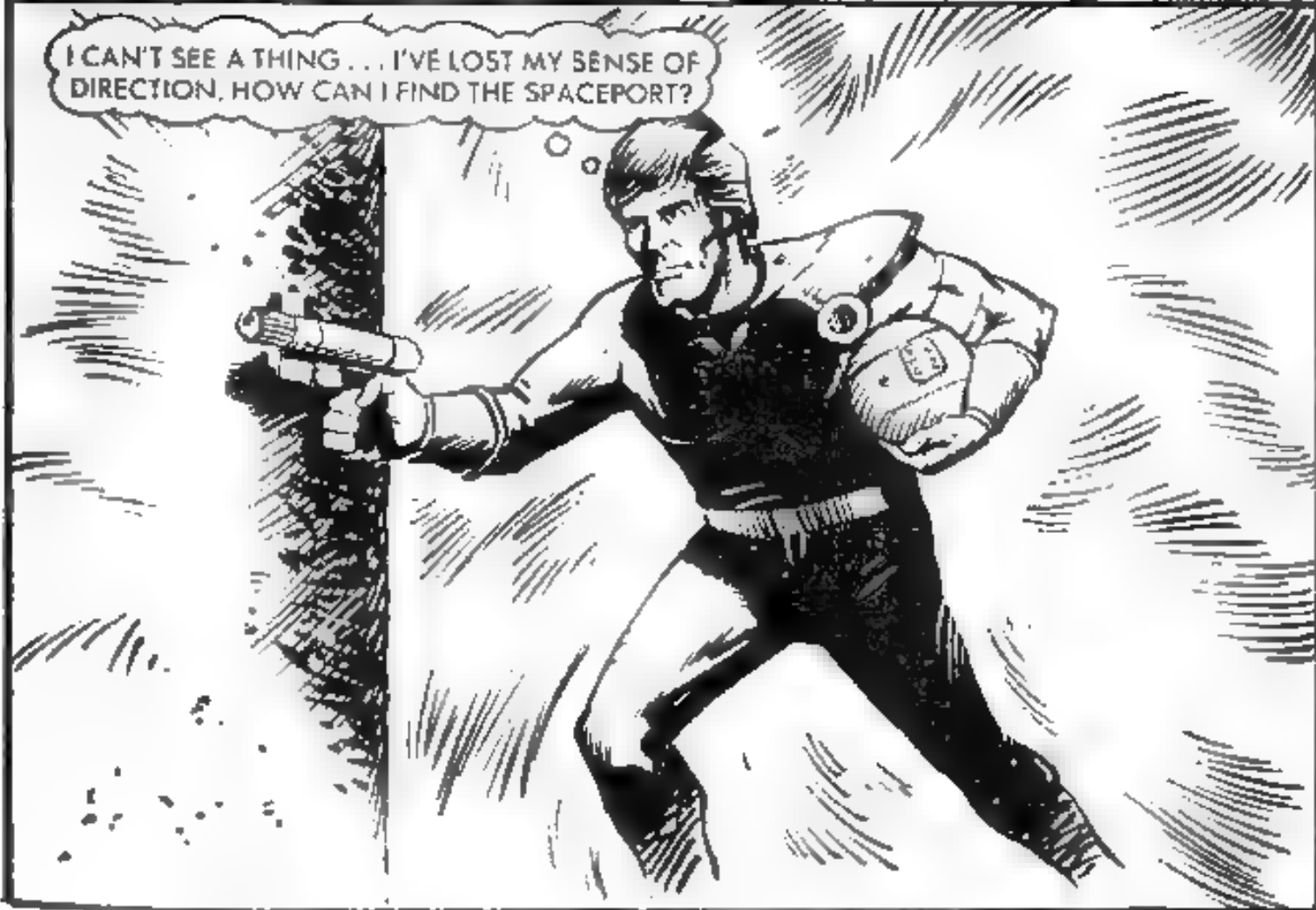
PLEASE, STRANGER, LET ME GO. I MUST GET HOME. YOU SHOULD GET OFF THE STREETS, TOO — IT'S THE CURFEW.

SUDDENLY THE WAILING STOPPED AND THE STREETS WERE DESERTED. A DENSE WALL OF FOG ROLLED TOWARDS HIM. ■

NOW WHAT? IT LOOKS LIKE
FOG — BUT ■ SEEMS TO BE UNDER CONTROL!



I CAN'T SEE A THING... I'VE LOST MY SENSE OF
DIRECTION. HOW CAN I FIND THE SPACEPORT?



LAYN STUMBLED ON, AND FOUND HIS PATH BLOCKED.

UGH... A ROBOT!



YOU ARE VIOLATING THE CURFEW.
SURRENDER, OR DIE.


OUT OF MY WAY!



BUT THE BLASTER FAILED TO STOP THE ROBOT WHICH ADVANCED MENACINGLY.

AS HE TURNED TO RUN, LAYN FELL.

HALT, YOU CANNOT ESCAPE. I CAN
SEE EVERY MOVE YOU MAKE.



ANOTHER FIGURE EMERGED FROM THE FOG.

WHO ARE YOU?

I AM DEMOS. STAND ASIDE, LET ME DEAL
WITH THE ENFORCER.



UNARMED, DEMOS TACKLED THE ENFORCER.

WITHOUT INFRA-RED EYES, YOU
ARE USELESS IN THIS FOG.

SURRENDER! YOU
CANNOT ESCAPE.



DEMOS BROKE FREE AND LED LAYN THROUGH THE STREETS.

HOW CAN YOU SEE THROUGH THIS FOG, DEMOS?

EASILY ... I KNOW THE CITY VERY WELL. THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS. THAT ENFORCER IS DISABLED BUT THERE ARE MANY MORE PATROLLING THE STREETS.

THE FOG STOPPED ABRUPTLY AT THE EDGE OF THE CITY AND THEY PAUSED. DEMOS REVEALED THAT HE WAS IN A GROUP OPPOSED TO MANIK.

YOU MEAN YOU'RE A REBEL!

NO, THE PLANET BELONGS TO US! MANIK IS A TYRANT WHO WANTS ABSOLUTE CONTROL. YOU HAVE SEEN HOW HE RULES THROUGH FEAR — AND THE CURFEW.

MANIK WAS A CITY GOVERNOR WHO TOOK POWER BY MEANS OF BRIBERY AND MURDER. SOME OPPOSED TO HIM SOUGHT SHELTER UNDERGROUND. WE AWAIT THE TIME TO STRIKE BACK.



BUT LAYN HAD NO TIME TO LISTEN FURTHER. HE HAD TO GET TO THE SPACEPORT.

WHATEVER THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE SITUATION, DEMOS, I HAVE AN IMPORTANT TASK OF MY OWN — TO CONTACT THE FEDERATION. THANKS FOR HELPING ME ...

NOT SO FAST, LAYN. I SAW YOU LEAVE THE PALACE. MANIK IS TRYING TO BUY ADVANCED WEAPONS TO WIPE OUT MY PEOPLE. THE ONLY OUTSIDERS HE ALLOWS NEAR TASSIN ARE ...

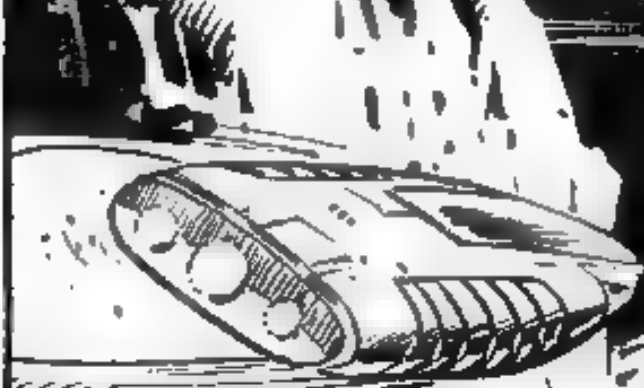
... RIM-RUNNERS!

DEMOS CARRIED LAYN EFFORTLESSLY
DEEP INTO THE COUNTRY.



THIS GUN-RUNNER HAS VALUABLE
INFORMATION ON THE WEAPONS
MANIK HAS OBTAINED. I'LL TAKE
HIM TO TASSIN. THOROUGH
INTERROGATION WILL EXTRACT
ALL HE KNOWS.

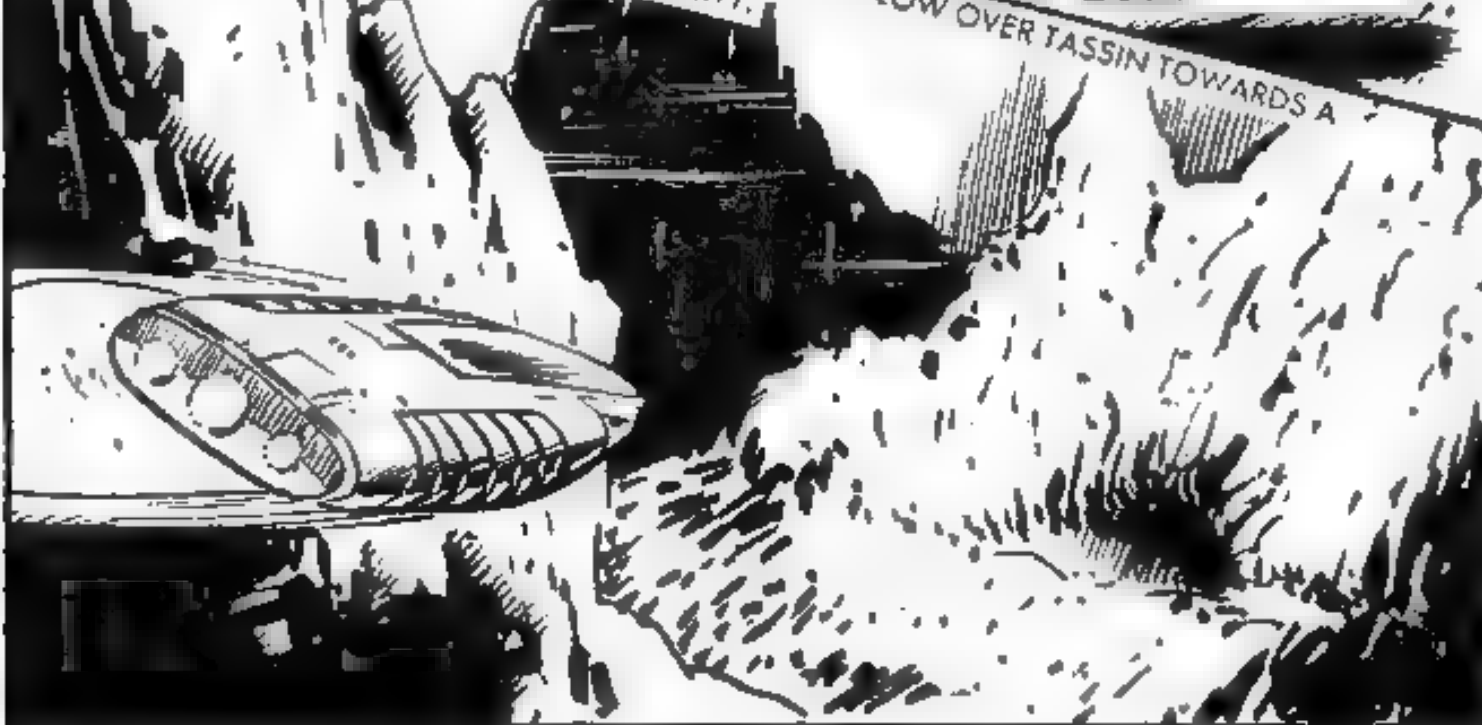
TO AVOID DETECTION BY MANIK'S FORCES, DEMOS FLEW LOW OVER TASSIN TOWARDS A
SECRET ENTRANCE TO THE UNDERGROUND CITY.



DEMOS REACHED HIS CONCEALED
HOVTRUK, BUT HIS DEPARTURE
WAS OBSERVED.



LOOK, THEY'RE GETTING AWAY! THE
REBEL SPY HAD A SCOUTSHIP HIDDEN.
ALERT CONTROL.



INSIDE THE CAVE, LAYN RECOVERED FROM THE BLOW TO HIS JAW.

DEMOS, YOU MUST LISTEN. I'M NOT A
RIM-RUNNER... I'M A FEDERATION
AGENT.

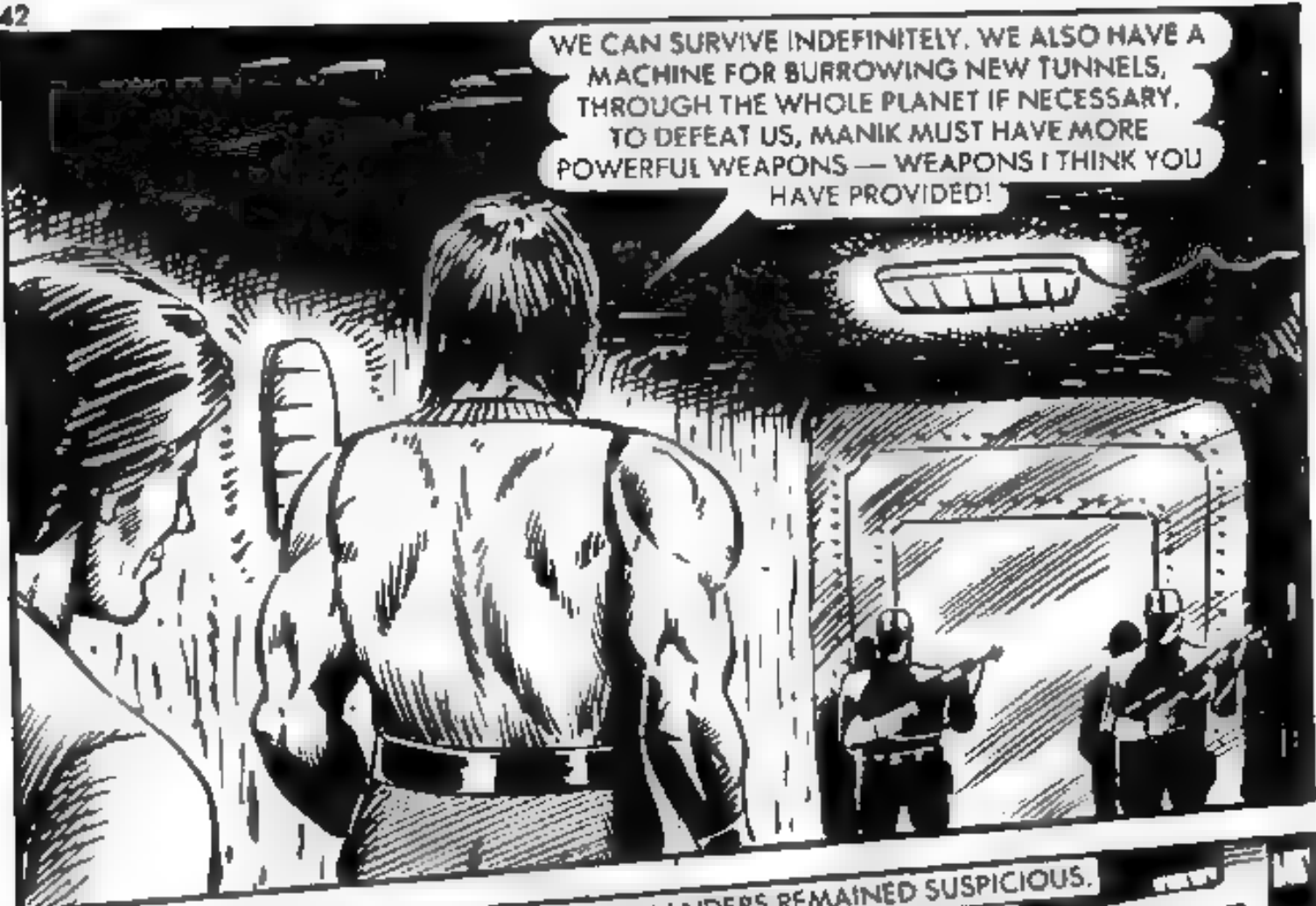
EXPLAIN TO
MY SUPERIORS.




DEMOS LED LAYN THROUGH A MAZE OF SHAFTS AND TUNNELS.

MANIK KNOWS ROUGHLY WHERE WE ARE,
BUT CAN FIND NO WAY IN. SO THEY
BOMBARD THIS GENERAL AREA.





WE CAN SURVIVE INDEFINITELY. WE ALSO HAVE A MACHINE FOR BURROWING NEW TUNNELS, THROUGH THE WHOLE PLANET IF NECESSARY. TO DEFEAT US, MANIK MUST HAVE MORE POWERFUL WEAPONS — WEAPONS I THINK YOU HAVE PROVIDED!



AFTER LISTENING TO LAYN'S STORY, THE COMMANDERS REMAINED SUSPICIOUS.

I SAY HE IS LYING! WE SHOULD FORCE HIM TO TELL US WHERE HE DELIVERED THE NEW WEAPONS. DEMOS CAN THEN DESTROY THEM.

NO! OUR POSITION IS DESPERATE BUT WE ARE NOT BARBARIANS LIKE MANIK. LAYN'S STORY IS SO INCREDIBLE, IT MAY BE TRUE.

■ IT IS, WE MUST HELP HIM... AND IN RETURN, HE CAN HELP US BY BRINGING THE FEDERATION TO OUR ASSISTANCE.

SUDDENLY, THE ARGUMENT WAS SETTLED —

COMMANDER, MANIK'S SOLDIERS HAVE
STORMED THE CAVE — HELPED BY ALIENS!
THEY'RE CUTTING THROUGH THE OUTER TUNNEL
DOORS. WE CAN'T HOLD THEM.

SKAR WAS DETERMINED TO RECAPTURE LAYN AND THE VORTEX DEVICE, USING
SOPHISTICATED GOTHAN EQUIPMENT. A COMBINED ASSAULT FORCE HAD TRACKED THE
SCOUTSHIP'S ION TRAIL RIGHT INTO THE SECRET ENTRANCE TO THE CITY.

NOW, DO YOU BELIEVE ME?

I'M CONVINCED, LAYN. TAKE
YOUR DEVICE — AND THIS GUN.

A GOTHAN TROOPER APPEARED ON THE TELESCREEN.

ATTENTION, REBELS! WE WANT THE
FEDERATION AGENT AND THE DEVICE HE
CARRIES. HAND THEM OVER TO ME AND YOUR
LIVES WILL BE SPARED.

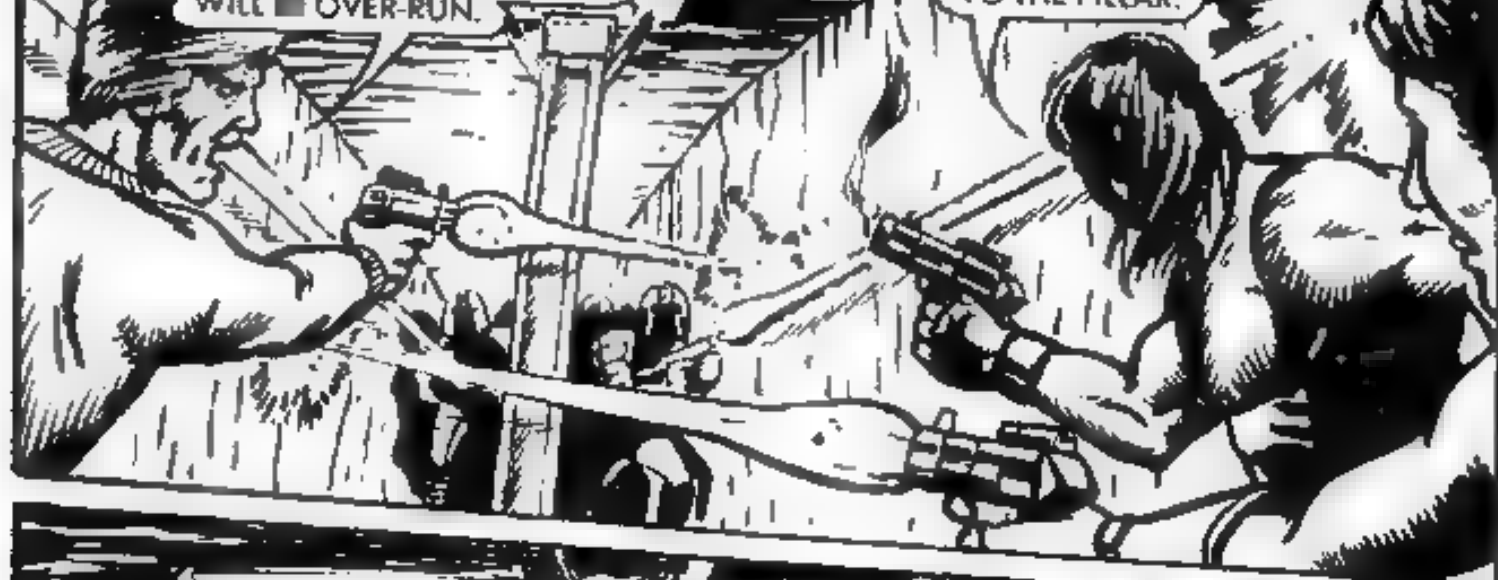
DON'T BELIEVE HIM. WHEN THE
GOTHANS HAVE WHAT THEY CAME FOR,
THEY'LL LEAVE MANIK'S GOONS TO
FINISH THE JOB.

DO NOT WORRY, LAYN. YOUR FIGHT ■
NOW OURS. WE WILL RETREAT TO THE
CITADEL AND DEMOS WILL GUIDE YOU
// BACK TO THE SURFACE.

THE ATTACKERS PUSHED FORWARD RAPIDLY.

NOTHING WE HAVE WILL STOP THEM.
EVEN THE CITADEL, OUR LAST REFUGE,
WILL ■ OVER-RUN.

THERE IS ONE CHANCE. CONCENTRATE
YOUR FIRE AT THE TUNNEL ROOF. CLOSE
TO THE PILLAR.



THE PILLAR ■ TOO STRONG —
IT WON'T GIVE WAY!

IGNORING THE FALLING ROCKS, DEMOS SPRINTED TO THE PILLAR.

DEMOS, DON'T BE A FOOL! YOU CAN'T MOVE IT THAT WAY. IT'S SUICIDE.

KEEP FIRING, LAYN. IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE THE CITADEL.

THE PILLAR GAVE, BRINGING TONS OF ROCK CRASHING DOWN.



LAYN COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THE COMMANDER'S LACK OF CONCERN. THEN...

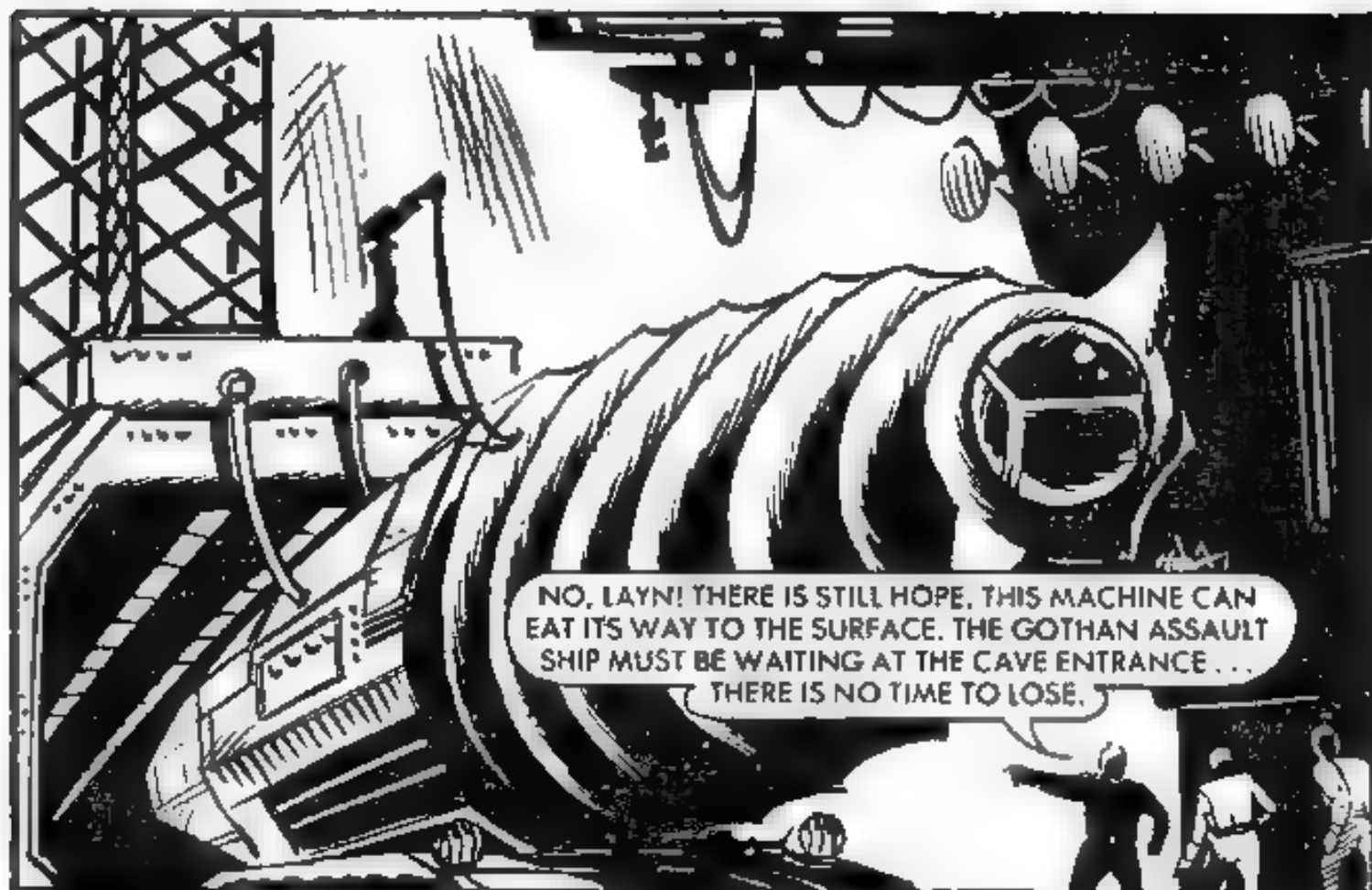
DEMOS... HE'S ALIVE!

HE PERFORMS WELL, COMMANDER.
NOTHING CAN STOP HIM.

THE CITADEL WAS THE DEEPEST PART OF THE UNDERGROUND CITY.

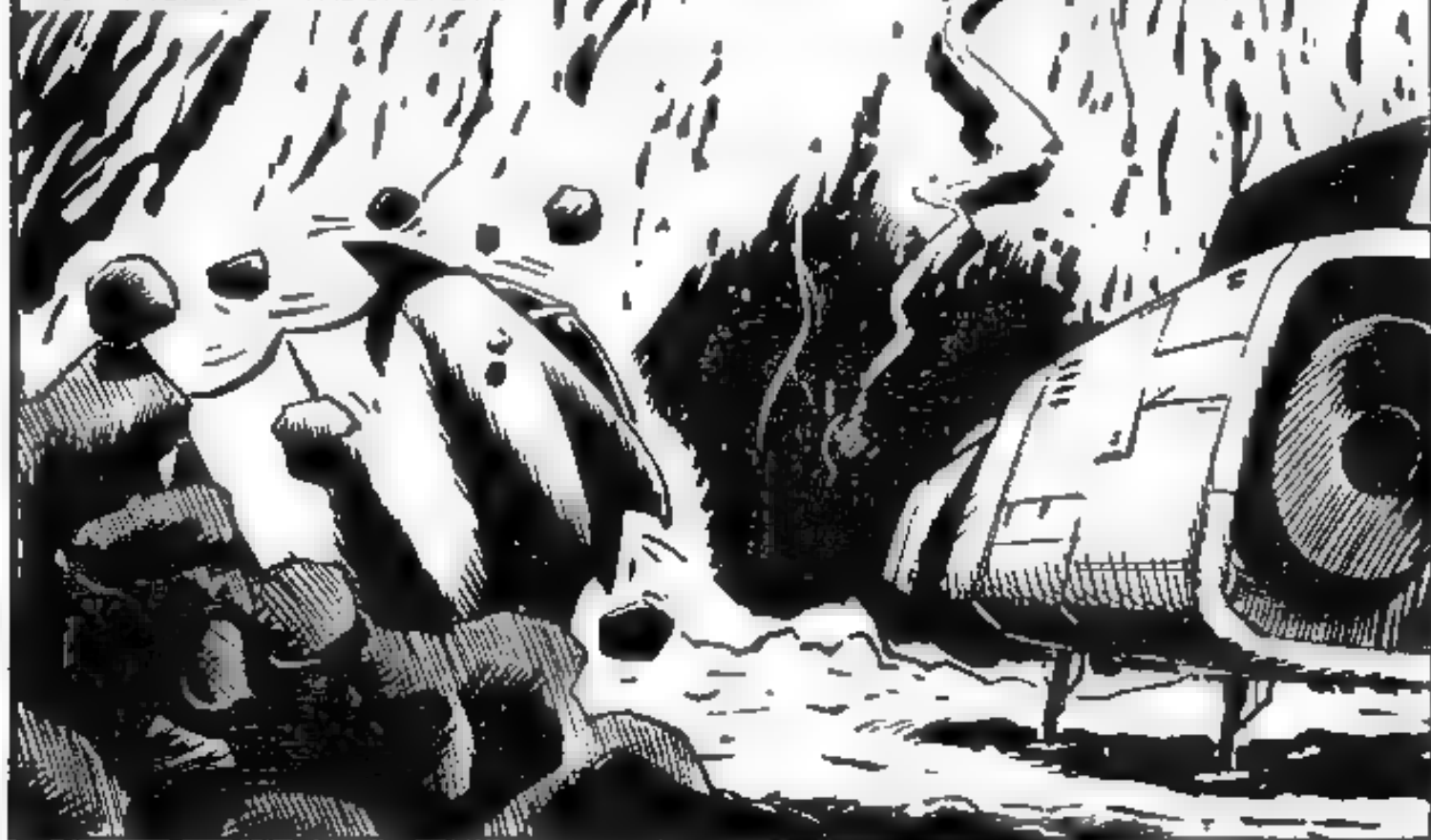
THERE IS SELF CONTAINED
ACCOMMODATION FOR HUNDREDS
OF PEOPLE. SAFE FROM MANIK'S
BOMBARDMENT.

AND THAT TUNNEL WAS THE ONLY WAY IN
... OR OUT!



NO, LAYN! THERE IS STILL HOPE. THIS MACHINE CAN
EAT ITS WAY TO THE SURFACE. THE GOTHAN ASSAULT
SHIP MUST BE WAITING AT THE CAVE ENTRANCE...
THERE IS NO TIME TO LOSE.

WITH DEMOS AT THE CONTROLS, THE MACHINE BROKE THROUGH TO THE SURFACE.
HIS NAVIGATION WAS SPOT ON.



LAYN AND DEMOS CREPT STEALTHILY ONTO THE SHUTTLE'S FLIGHT DECK.



THERE HAS BEEN NO REPORT FROM THE ASSAULT SQUAD. THEY MAY BE IN TROUBLE.



DO EXACTLY AS I SAY, GOTHAN,
AND YOU WON'T GET HURT ...

BACK ON THE GUNSHIP, SKAR ALSO WAITED FOR NEWS FROM THE ASSAULT SQUAD.

LORD SKAR, THE TERRAN AND THE
DEVICE HAVE BEEN CAPTURED. WE
NOW HAVE THEM ABOARD THE
SHUTTLE.

AT LAST... I HAVE SUCCEEDED!
RETURN IMMEDIATELY, THERE IS NO
TIME TO LOSE. I MUST NOT KEEP THE
EMPEROR WAITING ANY LONGER.

THE GUNSHIP SHOULDN'T BE TOO
DIFFICULT TO TAKE, DEMOS, ONCE
WE'RE INSIDE. IT HAS ONLY A SMALL
OPERATING CREW AND ALL OF ITS
TROOPERS ARE BURIED ON TASSIN.

AS SOON AS THE SHUTTLE HAD DOCKED...

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!

LEAVING THE VORTEX DEVICE IN THE SHUTTLE, LAYN AND DEMOS ACTED SWIFTLY

LET THEM HAVE
IT, DEMOS!

AAAGH!

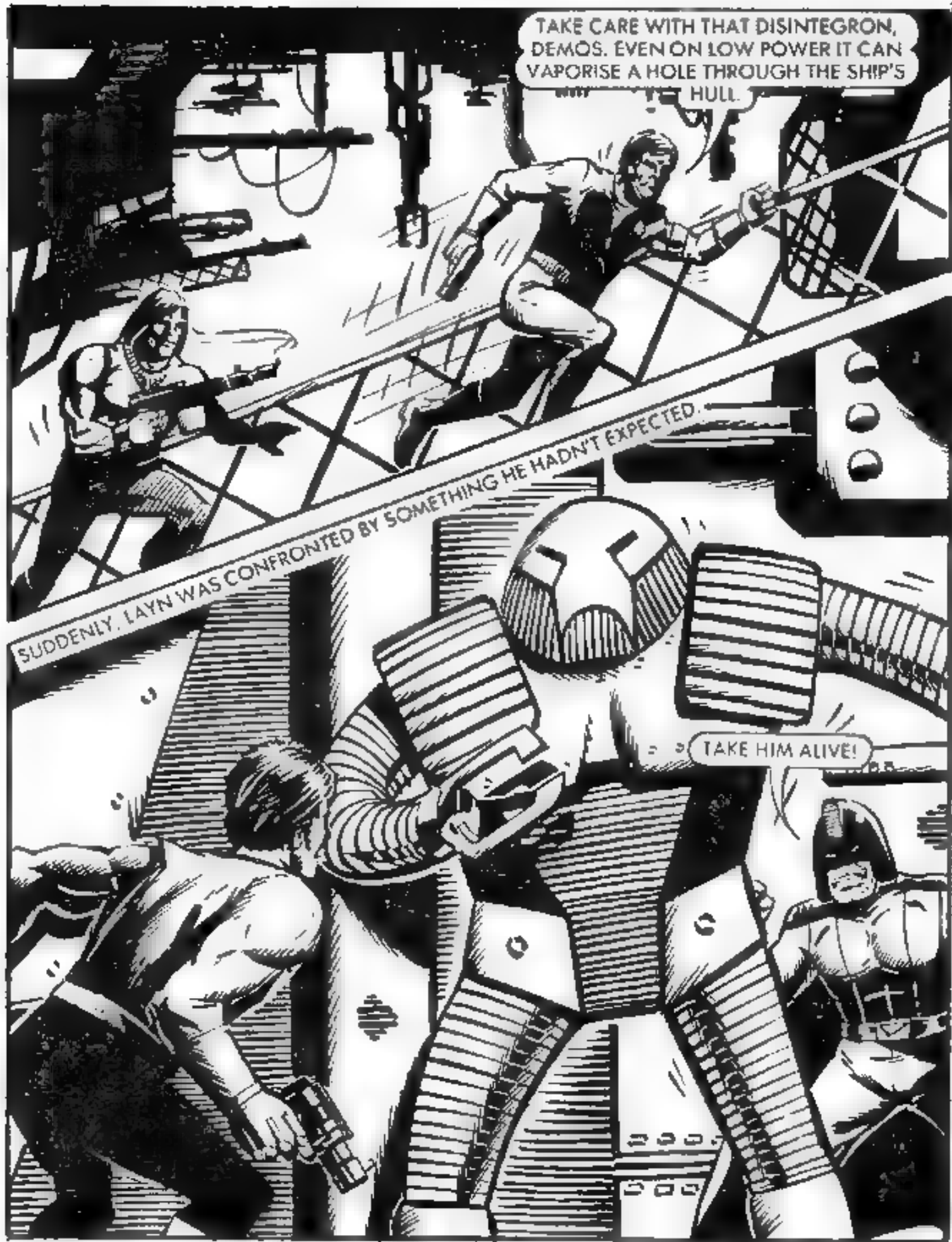
LOOK, THE GOTHAN COMMANDER
— A WARLORD!

AFTER HIM! STOP HIM
GETTING TO THE BRIDGE.

TAKE CARE WITH THAT DISINTEGRON,
DEMOS. EVEN ON LOW POWER IT CAN
VAPORISE A HOLE THROUGH THE SHIP'S
HULL.

SUDDENLY, LAYN WAS CONFRONTED BY SOMETHING HE HADN'T EXPECTED.

TAKE HIM ALIVE!





BUT THE ROBOT EVEN IN ITS OWN DEATH THROES MANAGED A DEADLY BLAST —



STUNNED BY THE BLAST, LAYN WAS DRAGGED AWAY.

LOCK UP THE TERRAN AND GUARD HIM CLOSELY. I HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF HIS TRICKS.



SKAR SEARCHED THE SHUTTLE CRAFT —

I KNEW THE TERRAN WOULD NOT GO FAR WITHOUT THIS. NOW THE FEDERATION WILL NEVER KNOW THE SECRET OF VORTEX TRAVEL — THE GOTHAN EMPIRE WILL SOON RULE THE GALAXY.

I CAN NOW RETURN TO TAKE MY RIGHTFUL PLACE WITH THE INVASION FLEET. BUT FIRST, THERE IS SOMETHING I MUST DO ...

THE GUNSHIP'S MAIN ARMAMENT FOCUSED ON THE PALACE AND CITY AROUND IT. MANIK WAS DESTROYED.




FAR AWAY, THE GOTHAN SPACEFLEET WAS BEING ASSEMBLED.

YOUR HIGHNESS, THE LAST BATTLESHIP HAS
ARRIVED. THE INVASION FLEET IS
COMPLETE.

LET US SLAUGHTER
THE TERRANS!





THE FEDERATION MUST NOT HAVE MORE
TIME TO GATHER ITS FLEET. I WILL WAIT
NO LONGER. WARLORDS, TO YOUR
SHIPS — LAUNCH THE ATTACK!

AS THE
EMPEROR GAVE
HIS COMMAND,
SKAR'S GUN-
SHIP WAS
ACCELERATING
TOWARDS THE
VORTEX

OUTSIDE LAYN'S CELL. ■ THE GLOOM OF THE ENGINE ROOM, THE GUARD WAS STARTLED BY A MOVEMENT IN THE SHADOWS.

WHO'S THERE?
SHOW YOURSELF.



THE COMMOTION AROUSED LAYN'S CURIOSITY.

WHAT'S GOING ON
OUT THERE?



LAYNE RECOILED IN HORROR FROM THE CREATURE STANDING BEFORE HIM.



NO...KEEP BACK...



LAYN, DON'T YOU
RECOGNISE ME?

IT CAN'T BE! THE VOICE...
THE FACE... IT'S DEMOSI!

YOU'RE AN ANDROID! NOW I
UNDERSTAND. HOW YOU COULD
SEE THROUGH THE FOG... HOW
YOU SURVIVED THE TUNNEL
COLLAPSE... AND THAT BLOW ON
THE JAW. I CAN STILL FEEL IT!

YES, LAYN, BUT NOW IS NOT THE TIME
FOR REMINISCENCES - YOU MUST
ACT.

TAKING THE GUARD'S GUN, LAYN SPURTED FOR THE BRIDGE.



HURRY! STOP THE GUNSHIP
BEFORE IT ENTERS THE VORTEX.

LAYN BURST ONTO THE BRIDGE AS THE GUNSHIP ACCELERATED TOWARDS LIGHT SPEED.

LORD SKAR, THE TERRAN ... AAAGH!

YOU AGAIN!

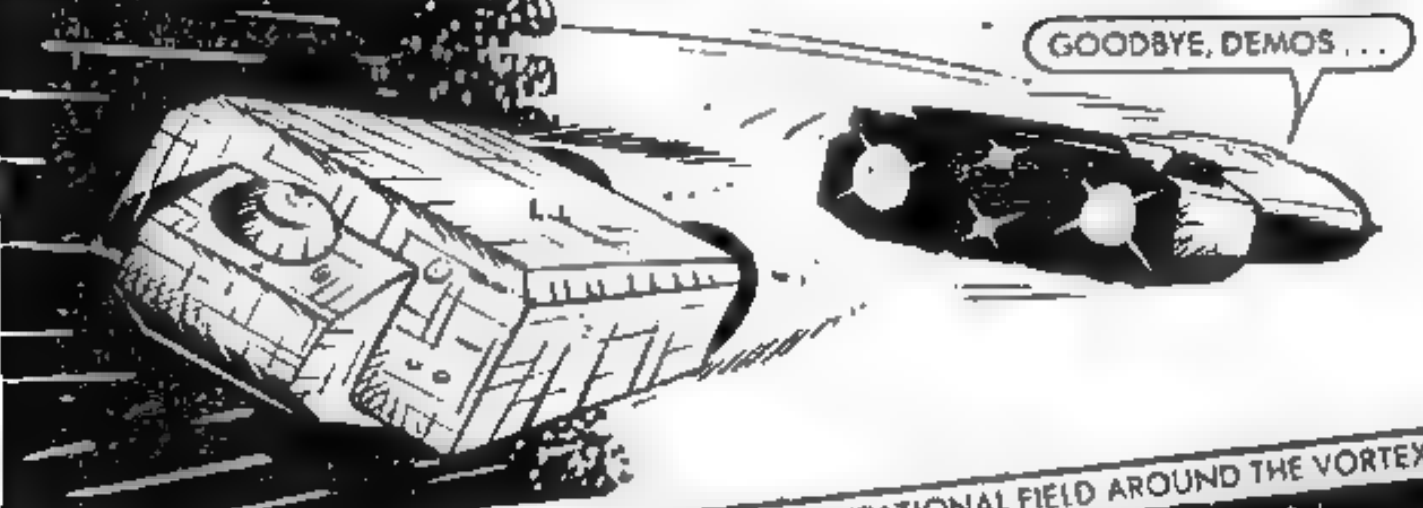
THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN,
SKAR. GIVE UP.

TERRAN, YOU ARE AN INTERFERING
FOOL. YOU HAVE DESTROYED THE
ACCELERATION AND STEERING
CONTROLS. WE ARE LOCKED ON
COURSE FOR THE VORTEX AND OUR
SPEED IS FALLING — WE WILL BE
TRAPPED INSIDE FOR EVER!





LAYN MADE A LAST FAREWELL TO THE ANDROID —

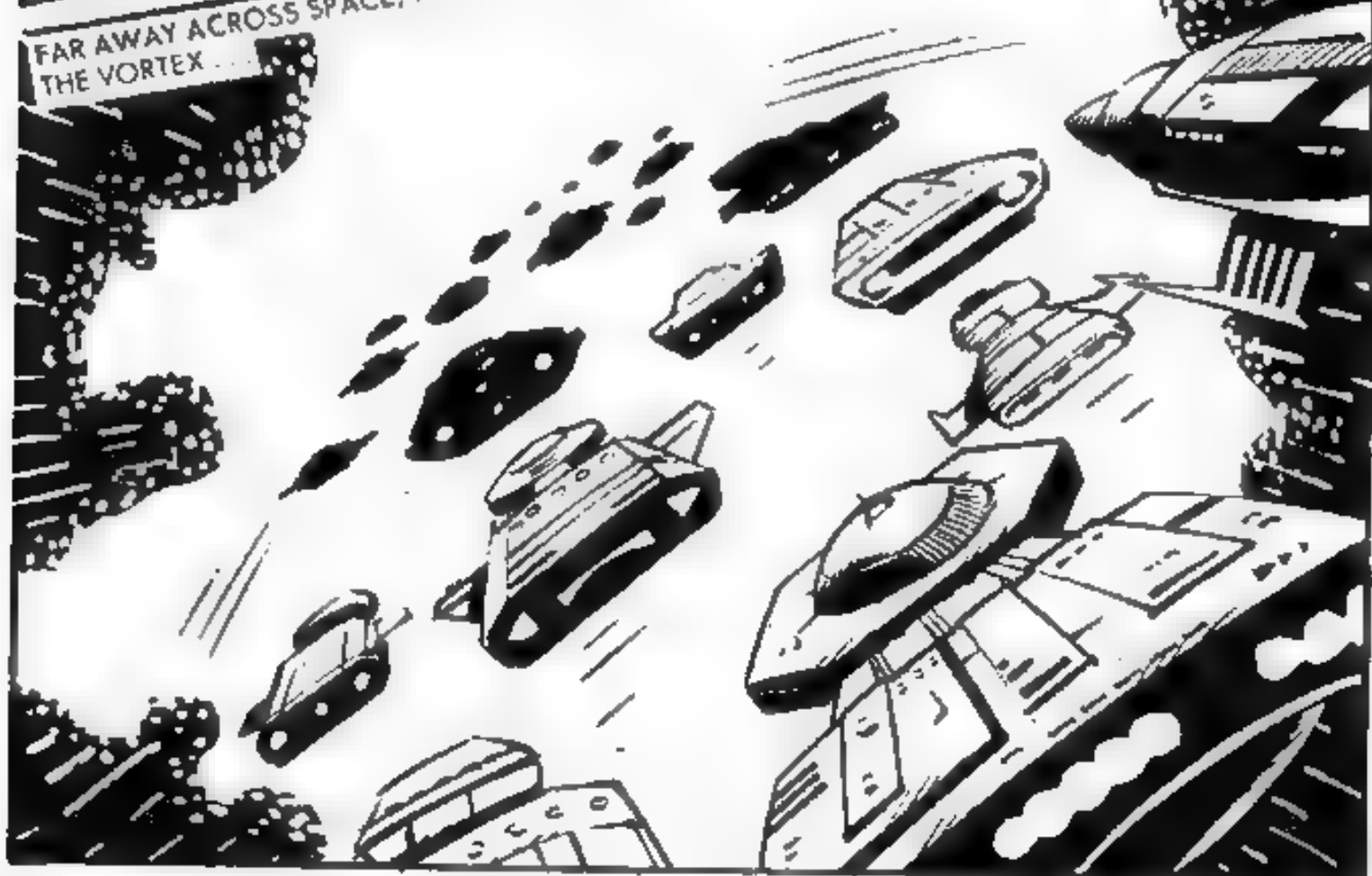


LAYN BOARDED THE PATROL SHIP AND IMMEDIATELY SENT A WARNING OVER HYPER-SPACE CHANNELS TO ALERT THE FEDERATION OF THE GOTHAN INVASION.

WE SHOULDN'T HANG AROUND, LAYN.
THE GOTHANS MIGHT APPEAR AT ANY SECOND.

I DON'T THINK SO. I HAVE A FEELING
THEY'VE MET THEIR MATCH. IF ONLY WE
COULD SEE INTO THE VORTEX...

FAR AWAY ACROSS SPACE, THE GOTHAN FLEET IN BATTLE ORDER HURLED ITSELF INTO
THE VORTEX...



... RIGHT INTO DEMOS' FIELD OF FIRE!



COMPLETELY SURPRISED, WAVE AFTER WAVE OF GREAT SHIPS WERE ANNIHILATED.

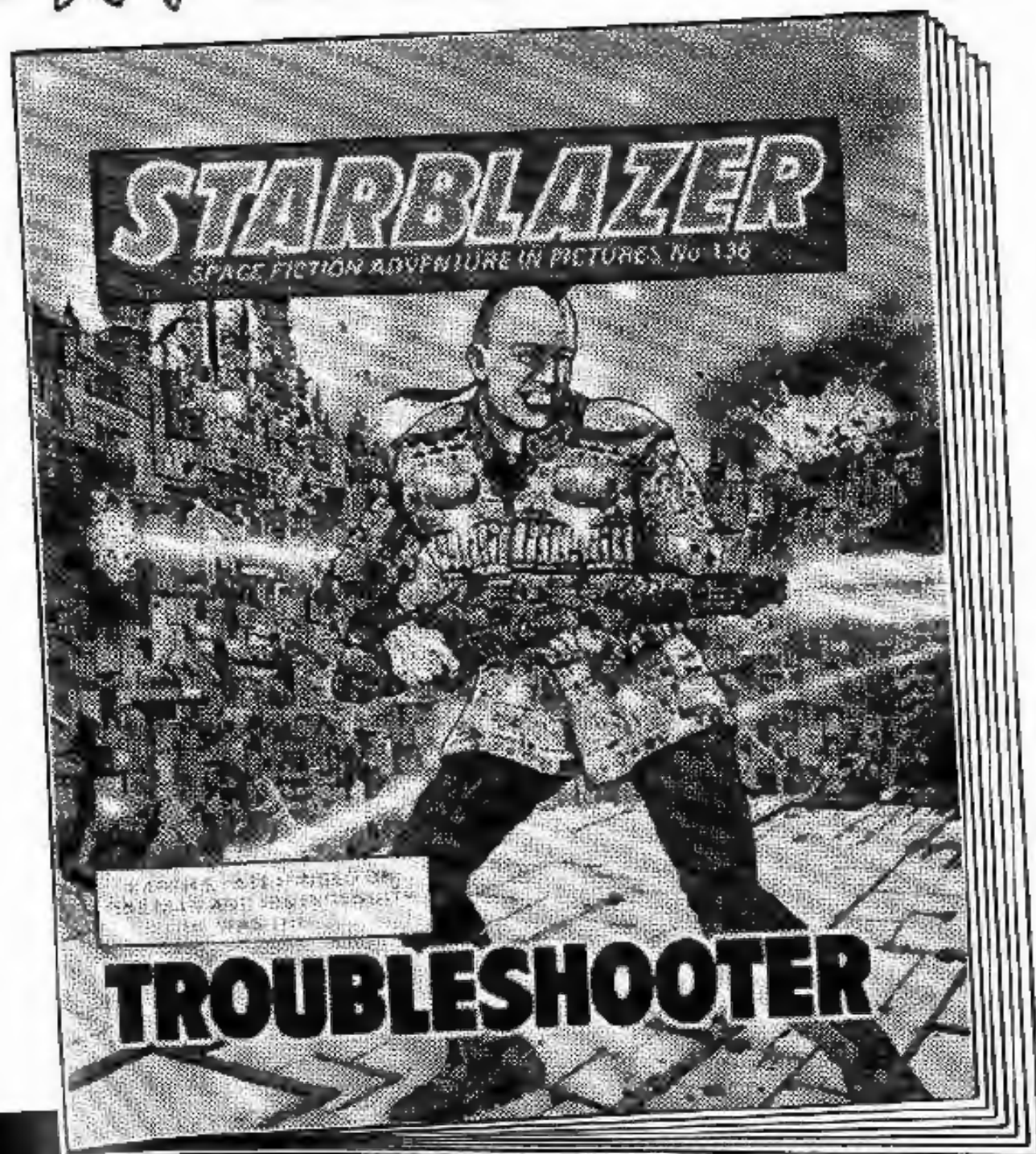
COME, LORD SKAR, OBSERVE THE END OF YOUR
EMPEROR'S MIGHTY FLEET — THE INEVITABLE
FATE OF ALL TYRANTS!



DEMOS AND SKAR WERE TRAPPED FOREVER IN THE VORTEX, BUT FOR DEMOS IT WAS A
VIGIL TO PREVENT THE LIKES OF SKAR IMPOSING THEIR EVIL WILL ON THE UNIVERSE.

**DON'T
MISS**

**THIS MONTH'S OTHER
ACTION-PACKED
ADVENTURE**



NOW ON SALE

The Apollo 16 mission lasted 11 days, 1 hr., 51 min., 5 sec. from launch on April 16, 1972. Lieutenant Commander Thomas Kenneth Mattingly, 36, USN was the command module pilot. Tenth man on the Moon was Lieutenant Colonel Charles Moss Duke, 36, USAF who is now a full time evangelist. Mattingly was the commander of the shuttle STS 4 (Space Transportation System), launched on June 27, 1982 for a 7 day, 1 hr., 11 mins., 11 secs. mission.

